

Six, Three, Seven

by May a Chance

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Summary: Arrested at ten for a non-existent crime, Spencer Reid has spent half his life in a cell the same length that he is. Called to consult on a BAU case, Spencer finds that circumstances can lead to powerful change.

1. Chapter 1

****This fanfic is based off of _Perception_ by Flow371.****

* * *

><p>Justice is sweet and musical; but injustice is harsh and discordant.
Philosopher Henry David Thoreau

There was a hilltop before him, golden brown with long stalks of grass and with a large oak tree, sturdy branches strong enough to support a full grown man, atop it. In the blue sky above, the sun shone and the beautiful golden beams warmed his features. The warmth soothed his mind. He relaxed beneath the warmth of the summer sun and strode through the long grass up to the tree where the grass was shorter. He fell into the soft bed beneath the immense tree and the caress of a summer breeze came across him. With that, he was further soothed by the beautiful day. He fell back, long limbs and auburn hair, falling into the dark and comfortable world of sleep.

In a very different world, the two so far apart it seemed impossible that both could exist, Spencer Reid woke up and curled tighter into himself in a desperate attempt to preserve the little warmth in his thin body. His long auburn hair, matted and tangled as it had been weeks since his last shower, hung over his eyes and curled at his neck. When clean, the hair became silky and hung as his shoulders in a shiny swath. The ragged clothes that he had been 'gifted' several long years ago hung loose off his too-thin frame of the twenty-one year old boy. There was no muscle on his body, and to Spencer it felt as though he hadn't moved in a month and his muscles rotted away as

such.

It had been at least a day and a half since he had eaten, and then it had only been a meager few bites of stale bread so horrid that they couldn't even bother to donate it to the poor. The poor were above people like Spencer.

In his twenty-one years of life, Spencer had learned that there was no one lower on the food chain than people like him, children whose parents or teachers went, "This child is going to become a criminal," and had them locked away without so much as a trial or psychological evaluation. In a world where it was guilty if accused, Spencer was guilty only of being born to a schizophrenic mother, and had been locked away as soon as his mother was diagnosed. It had been years since Spencer had felt the warmth of the sun, or even a semblance of warmth at all.

The sound of heavy feet pulled him away from his thoughts, and Spencer opened his eyes and weakly brushed his hair out of his eyes. The single person cell was tiny, scarcely space for Spencer's long limbs to stretch out to their full length, and even if there was more space than that he wasn't sure if he could have moved in that space with his body as hungry and dehydrated as it was. On the rare occasions Spencer bothered to open his eyes, he had seen that the tiny space was painted a dull grey- or, perhaps, that they simply hadn't bothered to paint it at all and what his blurred vision had seen was actually bare concrete. Either way, the walls seemed to soak up the chill.

There was a pause in the sound of pounding feet and Spencer's eyes slipped back shut, his head falling back to the ground. Somehow, he was hardly strong enough to raise his head. Intimidating, the feet grew louder as they went down the hallway until they were close enough they were right outside his door, and they paused. A sound that, in another time, might have been familiar to Spencer came through and he distantly recognized it as someone slipping a key into the lock of his cell and turning it, unlocking him from the tiny prison.

That was worth opening his eyes for. The door moved, and in Spencer's line of vision were a pair of feet and, thankfully, the legs attached to them. Higher up he hoped there was a body, but in such a weak state he couldn't glance up to check. The person entered the cell and crouched before Spencer, and then did he happen a glance at their face.

Dark hair, dark eyes and with what was probably once golden brown skin paled to a sickly yellow. Unlike Spencer, this person had muscle mass and looked strong enough to do more than just walk, or pick up something small, such as a leaf. One hand brushed Spencer's hair from his face and it was tilted upwards to look at the tall man. He flinched away from the touch. "Number seven-five-oh-nine-four-zero, Spencer Reid?" As best as he could, Spencer nodded in confirmation. "Your help has been requested on a federal investigation taking place in San Francisco, California. Come with me."

The man turned and left the cell, as though expecting for Spencer to follow. As if he sincerely believed that the weak man could have walked if he had wanted to.

He didn't want to follow, and even if he did Spencer wasn't sure he could. He flailed for a second, thrashing on the ground as he tried to gather his legs beneath him. They didn't cooperate, and nor was Spencer's psyche. In the past, he had done such consults and it was always just as bad as remaining locked in his tiny prison, because at least here he was familiar with the ground he had access to and knew what was coming in the following days. Out there, in the real world, a world Spencer hadn't truly experienced in eleven long years, he had no idea what to expect for everything was so foreign to him now. Even the pitter-patter of rain hitting the streets.

Calloused hands gripped Spencer and pulled him to his feet, shoving him through the door with more force than strictly necessary. His cold, bruised feet could hardly support his body as he was forced onwards.

* * *

><p>Long ago, Spencer had learned that being called on consults was the only way he would ever get a square meal. Before allowing him into the real world, it seemed to be required that he have something to eat with enough calories and protein to keep him going for a while. He'd also receive help showering, so at the very least he'd look presentable. On a consult, the cops always made sure to keep him fed, even if they were rarely kind to him. The higher ranking the officer, the crueler they were towards him. Spencer could only imagine what feds would act like.<p>

Either way, he was grateful for the plate of mashed potatoes and Caesar salad that they shoved at him, followed by a glass of milk and a protein shake. Though almost reluctant to eat such a large meal, Spencer quickly ate the salad and potatoes, then swallowing down the protein shake in as few gulps as possible and finally washing it all down with the cold glass of milk. By the end, he felt slightly sick but knew that it was better than the options for not eating what he was given.

The armed men escorting Spencer led him to the shower room, roughly shoving him in with a bar of soap, a container of shampoo and a container of conditioner. As always, the water was slightly cold when he stepped into the spray but it was the greatest thing he had felt in days, and so Spencer couldn't have cared less as he ferociously scrubbed his body clean, rubbing the sweet-smelling conditioner into the tips of his hair with delight. All of the grime that had covered him in a thin sheet was washed away by the cold spray and he finally rinsed his hair a final time before taking a towel to pat himself off. Someone had left him a change of clothes, something a little warmer that would actually fit him.

About twenty minutes later, Spencer found his wrists enwrapped with padded cuffs, a chain stretch between them and his form being led away from the Detention Centre in which he had spent over half of his life. The bus took him to a private airport, and from there he was on a plane set for San Francisco.

The sun shone through a window of the plane and Spencer curled up in a spot of the warm sun, dozing off to sleep. It was the best sleep he had gotten in a very long time.

When the young man, boy really, was shaken awake it was by someone

that he had never seen before, and he looked up at the young woman in confusion. She couldn't have been much older than he was, but was certainly in better condition than he was. She had straight blonde hair and blue-grey eyes, good muscle mass and a pretty face. He frowned at her in confusion.

"Hi," the woman said. "Spencer Reid, right? I'm Agent Jennifer Jareau with the FBI, I believe we called you in to consult?"

Understanding dawned on Spencer's face and he sat up, rubbing at one eye. His voice was rough with lack of use. "That's me. Hi." He lifted one hand slightly to wave and stumbled to his feet. "What's the case?"

Agent Jareau led him from the plane, not bothering to grab his arm and rather trusting Spencer to follow. He noted it, thinking it was strange. Her words were precise, formal, as she detailed the case. Four murders, all taking place in the past month. All of the victims were from different social classes and of different ages. As best as their team could tell, there was no connection between the victims aside from race and gender. Reid nodded along, putting in a little insight now and then.

"This guy sounds organised," he offered up at one point as Agent Jareau directed him into the passenger seat of the dark federal vehicle. She nodded in agreement. A minute ago, the federal agent had handed Spencer the case files, and he grimaces at the bloody murderers. "The MO's consistent, too. They always starve to death... three weeks and three days after their abduction." A dizzy spell hit him as the sun shone through the windows of the car and he grimaced.

Whilst the light was warm and comforting, the stabbing pain in his eyes was not. Agent Jareau pulled something from the cup holder between them, handing him the dark objects. He glanced at it in confusion, before distantly recognizing sun glasses. He placed the large object over his face and was delighted to find his headache soothed.

"Thanks." He studied the pictures a little bit more. "He might be OCD. Everything is identical. And there is something the same about them... I don't know what, though. Something palpable, about their faces. The murderer probably doesn't even know he's doing it."

"UnSub," the agent offered as they pulled up to police department. "Or unknown subject. Glasses fit okay?"

Spencer touched a hand to his nose, pushing the glasses back up his gaunt face. "I guess so. Don't really know what they're supposed to feel like."

When she smiled, Agent Jareau exuded an air of calm energy, and Spencer found himself ducking his head and grinning back at her. "You're not supposed to notice them being there."

"Huh. I think they're working." Agent Jareau smiled at Spencer, and it was a gentle smile similar only to the ones Spencer could remember receiving from his mother a lifetime ago. For a second, he wondered what had happened to his mother, whether she'd been executed or

shoved into the same tiny cells as Spencer had been.

The California sun felt wonderful, despite the cool breeze running through the air. Unlike the Nevada winds Spencer had been used to growing up, the coastal breeze of San Francisco was almost damp against his pale skin. The sun though, that was similar to the way it had felt back home. A constant, pounding warmth against his skin that seemed to reach bone deep. From what little he had seen of San Francisco from pictures, Spencer knew that the city was beautiful and such thoughts were corroborated by the tall line of green trees that lined the street in front of the police department. There was less traffic on the street than Spencer may have expected, but it gave the street a quieter feel.

Agent Jareau held the door inwards open for Spencer and led him up the elevator and through hallways until they reached what seemed to be a conference room on the fourth floor. She gestured at a couch facing the boards on which they seemed to have set up for victimology and modus operandi. Spencer gazed at the boards curiously, for they were vastly different from the ones that he had seen before. He squinted at the blurred letters, but eventually began to make out words.

The sunglasses, now unneeded in the dim room, were carefully removed from his face and placed onto a nearby table. "I can't see," he grumbled, half glaring at the board and taking another step closer to it. The words cleared slightly but, for the most part, remained a blurry mess. "That says, 'seven thirty-nine', right?"

The young agent grimaced. "Nine thirty-seven, actually. You know your prescription by any chance?"

"I don't have any medical prescriptions," Spencer replied instantly. "I live in a six foot by three foot box without access to medical care. Of course I don't have any prescriptions."

There was a long pause in which Agent Jareau seemed to digest the information. "We can get your eyes tested. Come on. No one else will be back for at least half an hour and I can help you with contacts if you need it."

Though confused, Spencer allowed himself to be led away by the young agent.

* * *

><p>With glasses on, the world seemed horribly sharp on Spencer's eyes. The colours seemed brighter, even the tans and greys that were the most common colour at the San Francisco PD. He almost flinched at the bright colours on the board but relaxed as his eyes adjusted to it. Even sitting on a couch several feet from the board, Spencer could see the letters and wasn't that peculiar. Unaccustomed to being able to see much at all, his eyes took in the wondrous collage with ease. Agent Jareau was sitting nearby, going over autopsy reports and statements.<p>

Spencer's body was curled into as small of a space as possible, his arms wrapping around his knees and chin tucked atop them as he rocked slightly on the soft couch. Obsessive, his fingers tapped against his leg in silent motions.

Their faces. There was something about each victim's face and he couldn't quite tell what it was.

The door to the conference room burst open and Spencer scrambled back as a tall man with black hair dressed in a suit strode in. "Each victim disappeared from a public place. Cecile Moore was visiting her niece on the Stanford campus and was buried in a grave exactly six feet by three feet, Cassandra Marks was taken whilst shopping and buried in a grave the exact same size. Colette Mondy was taken from a high school foot ball game and buried the same way and the last victim, Cacey Marley, was taken from a park and dumped in the same way. Each grave was five feet seven feet deep. All were held for three weeks before starving to death." The man glanced over at Spencer, who had shrunken into the far end of the couch and gave him a nod. "SSA Aaron Hotchner, you must be Spencer Reid."

Spencer nodded, not giving the offered hand more than a vague glance. He raised a hand in a quick wave but quickly brought it back to himself. "Hi."

"JJ, can I speak with you for a moment?" Agent Jareau nodded and followed the intimidating man out of the conference room. Spencer stole a glance at the statements and autopsy reports. Very slowly, Spencer stood and crept to the table, flicking through the pages and taking in information at a record speed.

It was obvious what the agents were talking about. Agent Hotchner likely wanted to know how Spencer acted in an early attempt to profile the twenty-one year old genius, and Agent Jareau would easily offer up the information. They always did.

When the agents returned, they brought a third agent with them, this a broad but slightly shorter man of dark colouration. Spencer had returned to his spot on the couch and was glaring at the images on the board. "Their faces fit the same way into DaVinci's idea of perfection," he announced. "None of them fit said ideal, but if you mapped their faces the maps would be almost identical."

The dark-haired man shot him a look and then glanced uneasily back at Agent Hotchner. "He's a criminal, Hotch. How are we supposed to work with one of the guys that we worked to put behind bars."

Long, nimble fingers tapped against his leg and Spencer glanced, almost panicked, at Agent Jareau. The blonde woman shot a glare at the new man. "Be nice to him," she scolded. "He's been nothing but polite thus far and you will treat him as such unless given a reason not to."

"He's a criminal," the man repeated. "Isn't that reason enough?"

"Actually," Spencer began and paused for half a second, wondering how to phrase his life. "I cannot be considered a criminal in the eyes of the law, as I have never committed a crime. I'm in the position I am because my mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia when I was ten. However, to the best of my knowledge, she has never acted violently towards anyone. My father actually had to fight with my teachers to get them to call me troubled." For a long minute, Spencer studied the new agent's demeanour and began to form conclusions. He

tipped his head to the side as he studied the man. "You're scared of me. Because you can't read me. And because I can read you."

Agent Hotchner let out a long sigh. "Morgan, this is Spencer Reid. Reid, this is Agent Derek Morgan. Both of you be polite and we will have no problems."

The dark-skinned man shot Reid a glare, and the gaunt young man shrunk back, eyes flickering to the ground before back to the board. Thing fingers gripped at his elbows, chewed nails digging into his skin. Agent Jareau shot him a concerned look, but didn't move. The muffled noise of her phone dinging brought Spencer back slightly, though he still didn't move as the young woman began to speak on the phone.

"Agent Jareau," she said into the phone and there was a long pause. "I see. Thank you." Agent Hotchner shot her a look; "They've found another body."

The agents looked nonplussed by the new discovery, but Spencer looked towards agent Jareau. "Can I come?" Agent Morgan shot Spencer a cold look and growled his way from the room, but Agent Jareau sighed and nodded. "I have a suspicion on what's going on but I'd like to make sure first." He considered for a long minute. "Though given the number of victims corroborating my theory, it really is quite unnecessary."

2. Chapter 2

Wow. I really wasn't expecting this to take off. Now I feel like I'm going to disappoint everyone with this chapter because there isn't more. Nonetheless, I hope that you all enjoyed for this short period of time. I'll have you know this is one of the best reactions I have ever received for any of my works.

This was written before the first chapter was published and extended and edited after the first chapter was published. Thank you for reading.

I may write time-stamps and extensions later on, but for now this is it.

* * *

><p>For this car ride, Spencer was bundled into the back seat of one of the federal SUVs, Agent Morgan driving with no one else in the car. Agent Jareau and Agent Hotchner had taken a second SUV, picking up the final team member along the way. The first ten minutes or so, driving through the city, was awkward and Spencer shifted in the soft seat.<p>

In comparison to his entire world, that of the police department was his version of a five star hotel. He was relaxed in the back seat, despite being around a person who blatantly disliked him.

Something in Agent Morgan's eyes revealed to Spencer a small clue he had been looking for. "You don't like me because I'm what you could have been, in a different world."

The man practically jumped out of his skin at the young man's sudden words and he sighed. "I don't like you because you're a criminal."

"No I'm not. I'm just the kid that was unlucky enough to have a father that didn't like him. If that makes me a criminal I'm not sure how anyone can not be a criminal." The calm logic was soothing to Spencer, something that he found inherently soothing no matter what the circumstances. When he had been a young boy worrying about kids at school, he'd done complicated math equations to calm himself, or pulled out his mother's annotated copy of The Canterbury Tails and read to his heart's delight.

Math was a constant, something that never changed. The same could be said for Chaucer's best known work, though in a different way.

There was a long pause before Agent Morgan spoke. "Why do you say that you're what I could have been?"

"Because of what they did to you." Spencer rolled his eyes at Agent Morgan's in the mirror, then smiled gently. "I know that they hurt you and made you feel like nothing, and that you can't do anything about it without becoming like me, which is an even worse fate."

Again, there was a pause. "How bad can those facilities be?"

Spencer considered the question, and eventually came to a horrific conclusion. "I've spent the last eleven years of my life locked in a cell three feet by six feet, too weak to stand from lack of food. I had my first solid meal in five months today, and it consisted almost entirely of carbohydrates. Since I turned fourteen, I haven't been around anyone my age and even then spending time with others was rare. We sometimes shared cells, but that was it. Before today, I hadn't felt the warmth of the sun on my skin in at least seven months. I was unable to complete my high school diploma, let alone attend a good university as was my dream."

"What uni did you want to go to?"

Now that was a question to consider. "Caltech was my first choice. Then maybe MIT. I also looked into ETH Zurich. They have one of the best mathematics programs in the world, and it would have been a good place for me to continue to learn new languages. Switzerland is, by all means, is the centre of Europe. I'd have had easy access to almost the entire continent by train. Imperial College London would have been great, too. That's the British version of MIT. I was going to apply to UBC as my backup plan, if I didn't get accepted anywhere else."

"Wow. I haven't even heard of half of those places."

Spencer laughed, for the first time in what felt like years. It made his throat hurt, and he cut off the sound quickly. "Half of them are foreign. ETH Zurich is in Switzerland, Imperial College in London and UBC is in Canada. They're all ranked as some of the best colleges and universities in the world."

"What were you going to study?"

Another question worthy of consideration. Spencer thought for a long minute. "Everything. Mom was a fifteenth century literature professor and my dad was a lawyer. I intended to cure schizophrenia by twenty-five and improve lives internationally because of it. Now it doesn't matter what I want. I'll never get out of that place, Agent Morgan."

They drove in silence after that, the grim truth of Spencer's statement hanging over them both like an angry cloud.

Spencer Reid had never really understood metaphors, but as time went on he got increasingly good at masking his odd behaviour and acting normal. He stopped flinching away from hugs, no matter how much he hated a stranger's body against his. He stopped tapping his foot in the erratic patterns of Ligeti: Etudes, an extremely difficult piece written by an extremely talented Parisian pianist. Slowly, Spencer learned to create connections between seemingly nonsensical metaphors. An angry cloud, he figured, came from the very young interpretation of storms as the sky being angry, and it's association with grimness from the way it seemed like the sky cried.

All of his knowledge and acting ability couldn't prevent Spencer from tapping his leg in a complicated melody the rest of the ride.

He stepped from the black car, and followed Agent Morgan.

The crime scene was taped off, yellow bands creating a large square around the freshly dug out grave. Spencer ducked down to peer at the grave, and took note of the wooden structure over top of it. The planks had been carefully moved aside, but it didn't take much imagination to see how they would have fit together with the grave. Looking into the dark cavern beneath, Spencer felt the overwhelming feeling, again, that he knew what was going on. Something was just... familiar about the whole thing.

Agent Morgan hovered nearby, throwing theories off Agent Jareau. "Agent Morgan?" Spencer asked, directing his voice towards the intimidating man. "The grave is exactly six feet by three feet, correct? And from the planks to the bottom, it's seven feet?"

He received a nod of response, and Spencer closed his eyes. "I know what this is about. I know who did this, I know why he did this, and I might know how to stop him."

* * *

><p>Later that day, Spencer had a blanket around his shoulders and a warm cup of something or other in his hands. The wind had grown colder, and the meager clothes he'd been given simply didn't block out the wind. His hands remained chained together, though the cuffs had been loosened and Agent Jareau assured him that she was working to get the police chief to agree to remove them entirely. The FBI agents sat around the conference table, all eyes resting on Spencer. He took another sip of his drink and savoured the sweet flavour on his tongue. "The Detention Facilities that children like me are kept in are horrendous. We have hardly enough room to move and it wasn't uncommon for us to be forced to share tiny cells with other kids. They were exactly the same size as the graves. I shared with a guy named Ángel Rios.<p>

"Ángel was reported by his fifth grade teacher, Carmen McCall, when she realized how bad the bullying had gotten."

Spencer was a bullied kid too, and he knew that it had played a part in his illegal incarceration. If he hadn't been bullied, maybe they would have let him graduate high school when he was twelve and then move him into a tiny cell. Two years had been too long for them to risk hurting someone, even though he'd been a four foot ten kid with no muscle mass beyond what he used to carry his piles of books.

"They eventually deemed him a threat to society and he was locked up for no reason other than his Hispanic heritage. The guy never did anything or said anything. If he were white, he'd probably be a free, happy man today. Anyways, Ángel went through hell in those places, probably even worse than most of us because of his ethnicity, but he's also one of the only guys to have ever gotten out. At some point, someone looked over his file again and said that he shouldn't be imprisoned so they let him go and through him on the streets. I haven't seen Ángel in years, but to the best of my knowledge he's now killing people who remind him of his teacher because he blames her for being locked up."

There was a pause in the words.

"Understandable really. If I had been locked up for my colouration by a bitter woman, I'd be pretty upset too."

Supervisory Special Agent Jason Gideon, Unit Chief of the BAU team with the highest percentage of cases solved, was an intimidating man despite his initial appearance. He had an aging, weathered face and a balding head, what was left combed backwards on his head. The man had a long, crooked nose resting above a thin mouth and stubble-covered chin. Agent Gideon dressed like a college professor, with a simple plaid button up beneath a fleece, beneath a tweed blazer that was only missing the clichéd arm patches. He wore slacks and simple dress shoes.

Overall, the man looked like somebody's grandfather, kind and gentle.

But when Spencer felt those dark eyes digging into his own hazel eyes, he felt the sudden urge to shrink farther under the blanket and take back any word he might have said to offend the man. The gaze was deep, and soul-piercing.

In contrast to Agent Gideon's harsh gaze Agent Jareau seemed warm and kind, twirling her honey-blonde hair around a finger and offering Spencer a warm smile, a silent encouragement. Likewise, Agent Morgan did not smile but rather gave Spencer a look that said clearly, "I'm with you."

Despite his unfeeling face, Agent Hotchner remained kinder than Agent Gideon. "You catch that Garcia?" He asked, and there was a sharp clicking noise from the phone resting on the table that had Spencer flinching slightly.

"That is right my sweets. Ángel Rios was nine when he was placed in the Criminal Prevention Program and sixteen when he was released into... a mental hospital. He stayed there for about two years and

then they released him since he'd just turned eighteen. No high school diploma, no college education and no known address. This guy is a ghost. You'll need to give me more, sweetie."

Spencer blinked, unused to being called anything aside from prisoner or freak. Even his name felt foreign, sometimes. "His mom lived in San Francisco. They were Catholic. We all get something from home up until the age of eighteen and Ángel had a coin with... Gabriel on it. He used to say that the only way he'd ever be free of the government was if he were the fastest angel in all of heaven. Search for people named Gabriel living in ess-eff that fit Ángel's description."

There was a ferocious tapping on the other end of the line, and Spencer shrunk back at the noise.

"We have a Gabriel Castell, twenty years old, matches the descriptions of Ángel Rios. And his history looks fake."

Agent Hotchner nodded, already standing to move. "Good work Garcia. Send us the address."

"Already sent," the woman chirped, and there was a sharp click on the other end.

Agent Gideon's gaze remained on Spencer.
"Seven-five-oh-nine-four-zero, you're staying here."

Internally, Spencer growled at the use of his serial number. Each time he heard it, the digits acted as a painful reminder or what he had lost, and of what he could never regain. Spencer shrunk back, pulling the blanket tighter around his shoulders and tried to stop the desperate shivers that ran down his spine. Despite his misgivings, Spencer nodded. Even if he hadn't agreed with the agent, he was a malnourished man too young to be an FBI agent with his hands chained together. Agent Jareau shot him a sympathetic look, but rose with the rest of the team. She, like the others, had a gun at her hip.

"Just... Stay here."

And he did.

A few hours later saw Spencer curled up on the couch beneath the blanket, his wrists sore from the restraints but unbound. Agent Jareau, JJ as she told Spencer to call her, sat nearby; her gentle gaze flickered back to the young man every few minutes. In sleep, he flinched at every noise. Soft mutters came from his mouth and Spencer shifted. In an instant, JJ was at his side and rubbing a gentle hand through his hair. He calmed beneath her hand, and JJ returned to her post.

Agent Hotchner, Hotch as he insisted, popped his head in and JJ caught him with a sad gaze. "He's too young for this."

The rare smile he offered up was sad. "We're all too young for the things that happen to us."

"Hotch, those people beat him. They starved him and treated him worse than the dirt beneath their feet. He can hardly sleep and a top of

that we're sending him back there. He's gonna starve and he'll keep starving until they lend him out to some cop who'll hurt him."

"I spoke to Gideon," Hotch said. "He agrees; we've gotten permission to take him with us on cases, and while in Quantico he's gonna help with consults."

JJ perked up at the news, grinning at the older agent. Her smile pulled a sincere one from Hotch. "Where will he stay?"

"I've heard he and Morgan are getting along."

As it turned out, Derek Morgan was a kind man who was more than willing to deal with a traumatized young man. Each time Spencer awoke sobbing in the middle of the night, arms wrapped around his own body, Morgan slipped into the room and rested a hand on his smooth, mahogany hair. Each night, Morgan spent at least fifteen minutes soothing Spencer, curling the young man up to him and assuring that his touch was always firm, very much there.

The touch was always comforting, and Morgan often found himself rubbing at Spencer's scalp to soothe the younger man.

Each morning, Morgan guided Spencer through regular morning routines, reminding the other man to brush his teeth and eat breakfast. Since, of course, neither had ever been part of Spencer's routine before. At around seven-thirty, the pair hopped into Morgan's car (he was teacher Spencer to drive, but for a genius the other was having a hard time picking up on it) to drive to the FBI headquarters in Quantico.

Not everyone was kind to Spencer at the FBI, but given that he was under the protection of a team with the reputation of being rather protective, the comments and other such bullying behaviours were kept to a minimum. Often, he leaned over varying shoulders and offered his opinion on the case files presented to them.

At some point in time, the FBI through their hands in the air and petitioned for Spencer to be declared a free man. It was done after extensive psychological exams and an impromptu trial. The jury's verdict was, of course, that schizophrenia did not equal violence. Especially when it was shown that Dr. Reid (to be the elder, soon) had no history of violent actions whether before or after her schizophrenic break.

Spencer was entered in the FBI Academy under special circumstances, and was not required the same physical levels as the other cadets, largely because eleven years of severe malnutrition made it difficult for him to put on any weight at all, though with time he was assured that he could gain the muscle mass that he would have had if Spencer had lived a normal life.

The doctors also expected his IQ to rise and for his memory to improve as time went on. Twenty weeks later, Spencer was a full probationary agent assigned to the Behavioural Analysis Unit in Quantico. It had been determined that Spencer would likely have difficulty working with unfamiliar people.

Both the BAU and Spencer were thankful for the development.

They became the first government employees to speak against the Crime Prevention Program, some of the first people to do so at all.

"Crime is not caused by poverty or a cruel childhood. As horrible as it seems, it is these people who grow up to be empathetic and meaningful members of the community. By all means, if we look to destroy crime, we should be destroying it from its roots in the greedy upper class. In my short time with the FBI, I have discovered that only one member of my team had a happy childhood, and yet these are the people that are saving the lives of the American people. If they had all been imprisoned, there would have been no one capable of taking their places and this leads me to believe that it is not the circumstances that make the criminal rather predisposed traits and subtle anomalies in the brain. These are not traits that we can just pick out. Trying to predict who is to become a criminal is like trying to find a needle in a stack of needles, or a fleck of gold at the bottom of the ocean."

Metaphors were so useful, sometimes.

A year later, Spencer was testifying as a witness to the unspeakable acts taken against the youth in the Crime Prevention Program. He spoke of Jack Richardos, who had starved to death at the tender age of eleven, and of Scott Taylor, who had been beaten to death not long later. The guard responsible for Scott's death hadn't even received a reprimand, Spencer recalled, and rather had received a medal of honour. As though beating a skinny thirteen year old to death was something to be proud of.

The young man spoke of what little he had seen of the other wings, racks that reminded him, horribly, of torture implements from the Medieval Era.

Charges were levelled, and psychological evaluations were taken of all of the people who had suffered at the hands of the corrupted system. All but very few, numbers consistent with the nation-wide statistics for people with murderous intent, were deemed safe for society, and released into halfway homes or programs designed to help them deal with the trauma.

Spencer grinned as Garcia passed him a glass of hot chocolate. He was twenty-three years old and had just submitted a dissertation, a mathematics one he had written in his head a thousand times, to Caltech and was hoping to have earned his first doctorate soon.

For the first time since he'd been locked away like a criminal, he had a family.

Golden sunshine, and long grass swishing in a cool wind. An oak tree, perched in the branches beautiful birds and squirrels and his friends. A blue sky, not a cloud to be seen and a gentle breeze. His auburn hair swayed in the wind, and the sound of laughter drew him from his reverie. His friends grinned down at him, offering him a hand up and he took it. The air was warm, in more ways than one. Like music to his ears, their laughs rained down with his own.

Let freedom reign. The sun never set on so glorious a human achievement.

>Activist Nelson Mandela<p>

3. Time Stamp 1

A long time ago, Spencer's mother had told him, "Sweetie, the first times are always going to be the hardest. But after that, it gets better." That had been before she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, and before Spencer's life was uprooted by the injustice of their modern world. Before he was locked away from crimes that had not, and never would be, committed. Those words were the old Diana Reid, the wickedly smart college professor who always made her students laugh whilst still teaching them all about fifteenth century literature, and old English. Those were the words of the most wonderful woman Spencer had ever met.

A firm hand rested on his shoulder, and Spencer looked over to see JJ, his grinning and blonde haired best friend. The steely-eyed young woman sat down next to Spencer, her hand kneading warmly into his shoulder like a kitten's warm paw. The motion was soothing, her hand firm enough to feel natural but not hard enough to feel restraining. Her eyes glittered with concern.

"You okay, Pence?" She asked, wrapping her arm around his shoulders and, gently but firmly, pulling him against her. Spencer sighed contentedly, enjoying the comfort his friend offered up. Despite being a tiny bit taller than JJ, she called him Pence, like the tiny coins that were only 18 millimetres in diameter (and that were twenty-three millimetres in diameter a hundred years ago).

He nodded. "Just thinking."

The grin he received was teasing and affectionate. "You're always thinking, short stuff. Brain always running a hundred miles a minute."

Large, doe-like eyes blinked at JJ. "Actually the brain can process twenty million billion bits of information each second. By all means, a hundred miles is quite slow in comparison." The woman laughed in response, squeezing Spencer's shoulder and hugging him closer; soon he was cocooned in her arms, safe from the outside world. He hummed contentedly, then spoke again. "I was thinking about my mom. They don't tell us anything about the outside world so I never heard anything about her."

JJ cuddled him closer and Spencer sighed. "Well we can find her, Pence. Believe me, with Penelope Garcia on your side you can do anything."

In the few months since Spencer Reid had arrived at the BAU, he had come to know Jennifer Jareau, JJ as everyone called her, quite well. She'd graduated as one of the youngest kids in her year and as valedictorian, starting college at the University of Pittsburgh at seventeen. Two years later she'd transferred to Georgetown and graduated with two BAs, one in psychology and the other in journalism at twenty-one. In her senior year, David Rossi, a renowned author and FBI agent, had given a talk that inspired the blonde to join the FBI. Coincidentally, she'd been assigned to the Behavioural Analysis Unit shortly after Rossi had left the FBI for an early retirement. She was four years older than Spencer, and his closest friend.

Even as a kid growing up in Las Vegas, Spencer hadn't gotten out

much. He'd gone from home to school to the library, where his mom would pick him up after work and then drive the pair of them home. He'd had no friends, being a (loser, freak, spaz) socially awkward, short genius. At ten, he'd been in the Freshman class of the local high school and scheduled to graduate in two year's time.

"I know," he agreed. "I don't know how she can deal with all of those... _things_... They're unnatural."

JJ laughed in response. "I don't know how you can read twenty thousand words a minute," she teased with a gentle grin, squeezing Spencer's shoulder. "But I'm glad you can just the same way I'm glad Garcia can type five hundred characters in a minute."

He let out a huff, blowing a long strand of hair out of his face. Their friend was, quite frankly, Spencer's exact opposite. She was friendly and tactile with everyone rather than just a select few and loved computers and hated hard copies of anything. Garcia was also comfortable with computers- beyond so. She lived in a little den/office in the back of the Hoover Building and in that den had a mixture of figurines, stuffed toys and computers. Especially the latter most option; she was constantly surrounded by at least five of the strange devices.

Whilst he could blame his lack of techy-ness on having been locked in a cell for eleven years while the outside world progressed, Spencer was quite sure that, even if he had lived a relatively normal life, he still would refuse the use of computers. His mother, oh how he adored the former professor, had never had a computer in the house and rather insisted on hard copy books and papers, making all of her student's essays by hand with little comments written in her careful red print. He'd often been told that apple didn't fall far from the tree in their case, and whilst it had once been comforting it had become a recurring nightmare of his. If he was so like Diana Reid, then would he, too, develop schizophrenia?

"No deep thoughts," JJ teased as she gave Spencer's shoulder another squeeze. "You think so much that you lose track of reality."

He blinked at her. "Lost in my mind is better than curled up in agony in the real world," he said softly. "What you don't feel can't hurt you, right?"

A second later he was being held even closer, both of JJ's long arms wrapped firmly around him and his face against her shoulder. It was wonderful for a long minute, Spencer's breath slightly raspy from the tight hug. Then JJ released him, but kept him cradled against her chest. "Pence, don't ever say that again." Her voice was slightly muffled by his newly conditioner-softened hair and soft clothes. "We want you to be safe and happy. We want you to feel safe with us and we want you to know that we're always here to help you. If you're ever hurting, I want you to come to us and let us talk you through your feelings so that you can feel better, not feel nothing."

Whilst there were no obvious downsides to the agreement - given the offered comfort and safety and _friendship_ - but he still found himself hesitant. Spencer sighed deeply, a harrumph. "I don't want to bother you," he managed to muffle out. "You guys have lives and I don't. I'm okay with that."

He couldn't breathe again, JJ's arms tight and constricting but all the same gentle and loving. "I don't care who locked you up or why they did it or what they said to you and made you believe. You are just as important as any one of us and nothing you can say will change my mind. When you're hurting, I want you to come to us and let us help. There's always going to be something we can do, even if it's just making a glass of hot chocolate. You're part of our lives now, and I don't think I could deal without you in it."

"Thanks JJ," he mumbled against JJ's shoulder, pliant and relaxed as he could be.

When Diana Reid had said that firsts were the worst, she hadn't been lying. But she also hadn't been lying about things getting easier.

End
file.